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OR,

A FRIENDLY WARNING TO YOUNG LADIES FORMING ACQUAINTANCE WITH STRANGERS.

A TRUE STORY.

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IT was one stormy Saturday afternoon, and Aunt Katie was reposing in her easy chair before the grate; the children were unable to go out, on account of the violence of the storm, and Ethel, Mabel, and Grace drew their chairs about the fire, and all with one accord requested their aunt to tell them a story.

"A story, my dear children! Pray what shall I tell?"

"Oh, something which happened in your own life," exclaimed Ethel.

"My own life! Why, my own life has been very uneventful! But I will tell you a true story of a very bitter experience which happened to a dear friend of mine.

"It was a beautiful day in September when Minnie Albright left her home — her beautiful home! — in a charming ancient city by the sea, where she had resided all her life; but, reverses having occurred, she was now obliged to earn her own living.

"Her poor mother had the misfortune to lose all her property — sixty thousand dollars — through the rascality of a well-known Boston lawyer, who, having became deeply involved in debt on account of extravagant living, had skipped over the line to Canada with all Mrs. A.'s property, together with the fortunes of many other victims, most of whom were residents of Boston.

"As the attorney's wife was an intimate friend of Mrs. A.'s, she placed the highest confidence in his integrity. Why, even the Bostonians placed him as candidate for mayor (but, fortunately for Boston, he got defeated), so that his downfall was a complete surprise to everyone. And Minnie, whose every wish had hitherto been gratified, didn't realize how hard it was to go out into the world and earn her own living.

"Her sister, who resided in the charming State of Pennsylvania, coming on that summer to visit her mother, had offered Minnie a home with her, and Minnie's departure with her sister, Mrs. Hastings, from her once happy New England home is where my story begins.

"It took nearly two hours for the train to reach Boston, and after waiting an hour at the Park Square station they took the Pennsylvania train for Mrs. Hastings' home. One night was spent

on the train, and our travelers reached their destination the following morning at six o'clock.

"Upon their arrival at Hillside two of Mrs. Hastings' pupils, Annie Moore and Rosie White, were at the station to meet them. Hillside was a beautiful village, built on the side of a mountain and surrounded by mountains, valleys, and natural scenery on every side.

"As Mrs. Hastings' residence had been closed during her journey East she and Minnie were invited to breakfast with their next-door neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. White. After the meal was finished our travelers hastened home to put the house in order, as all the furniture and carpets had been carefully packed away and it would require about a week to put the house in perfect order.

"Mrs. Hastings had discharged her girl, in order that Minnie might learn to assist her about the housework; but, as Minnie had always been accustomed to servants and had never been permitted to assist in the kitchen while at home, it was difficult for the poor girl to get interested in work which she had always been taught to avoid, so it naturally came very hard to her at first.

"After the carpets were put down, the furniture properly arranged, the paintings hung, and

the bric-a-brac put in order, the house presented a very tasty appearance.

"Since Minnie's reverse of fortune she knew how important it was to become a thorough housekeeper; but, as I stated before, being entirely unaccustomed to it, it was therefore almost impossible for her to become interested in it, and, as everything was new and strange to her, she preferred long walks, and visiting surrounding towns, to the monotony of domestic life. Also, being possessed of a lively, happy disposition, she soon made many warm friends among the neighbors.

"One beautiful day in the early part of October she went to a large adjoining city, to attend the Grand Army Reunion. The streets were crowded, the houses gaily decorated, and the grand procession, enlivened by many bands, made the day extremely lively; but, when Minnie arrived home that evening, Mrs. Hastings and her son Francis (who had recently returned home from his vacation) both greeted the girl with indignation, for not staying at home to assist about the work, instead of going off for pleasure. However, after repeated failures, Mrs. Hastings procured a popular book for Minnie to canvass, and in this occupation she made a great success; so it was finally decided that Minnie should assist

about the work mornings and canvass afternoons.

"Francis, being a University student, felt his superiority, and felt greatly humiliated to think Aunt Minnie should go out canvassing; so, with the neglect of early domestic training and the disgrace of being a canvasser, poor Minnie soon found herself very unpopular with her fastidious sister and her son Francis.

"One evening, when Minnie returned home weary and tired from her work, Francis flew at the poor girl in great anger, saying, 'What right have you to be publishing our names all over Hillside? Didn't I charge you to tell no one where you are stopping?'—and this outburst of passion was caused simply by Minnie's informing some persons whom she had met while canvassing, and who had questioned her, that she was stopping with her sister, Mrs. Hastings. Now Mrs. Hastings, being a widow, depended solely upon her daughter's earnings for support; and, as the poor girl played all over this broad land, to raise money enough to support her mother, brother Francis, and herself, she felt she had enough to do without having to support Aunt Minnie. But Minnie was proud, ambitious, and a successful canvasser, and as she paid her board regularly every week, and bought many useful arti-

cles for the house, she thought it decidedly mean and unjust to be constantly taunted with living off Violet's charity.

"Away among strangers, her lovely home, kind mother, and dearest friends hundreds of miles away, together with these constant taunts from Francis and his mother (all on account of her natural honesty and lack of domestic tastes), made the poor girl nearly beside herself with grief. One day, in a fit of desperation brought on by this continual fault-finding, Minnie sent for a matrimonial paper; for, being of a romantic, trusting nature, she felt the need of a home and someone to love and care for her, in case she outlived her mother, who was already very aged.

"Unfortunately the paper came, full of advertisements from every State in the Union. Finally she decided to answer one, which read as follows:

"'New Jersey. — Widower 38, 5 feet 3, weight 115, light brown hair, blue eyes, lover of home, teetotaler, member of I. O. of G. T., desires to correspond with home-loving ladies of suitable age, who are not flirts. Beauty or wealth not necessary. Object marriage.'

"So poor Minnie imprudently answered the above advertisement, together with a few others;

but, after receiving replies from them, decided to only correspond with the New Jersey man.

"He represented himself in glowing terms; said he was one of the most popular men where he lived, an ardent Christian worker in the M. E. church, and strictly temperate. He professed to be delighted with Minnie's letters (which he answered promptly), and expressed great desire to see her and get acquainted personally.

"After corresponding one month it was decided for Minnie to meet Mr. Larkell in the parlors of the leading hotel in Hillside, 'The Metropolitan.' The interview was to take place the only day Mr. L. could leave his business, which was Saturday; the hour set was 5 P. M.

"As Minnie had been busy all that day, canvassing in a neighboring city, she was obliged to hurry in order to reach Hillside in season to meet her prospective lover at the time appointed. Upon her arrival at the hotel Mr. L. wasn't there; but, upon searching the hotel register, she read the following: 'Walter Larkell, Somerville, N. J.' So then she was satisfied that Walter was in Hillside and couldn't be far from the dear girl he was so anxious to meet.

"Minnie was to wear a blue dress, plush cloak, and blue velvet toque; while Walter was to carry

a handkerchief in hand, as a mark of recognition.

"In a few moments a little man with a ministerial appearance entered the room. He wore glasses, had on a swallow-tail coat, white necktie, kid gloves, and also wore a tall hat; in appearance he was a gentleman born and bred. The little man walked up to Minnie, put out his hand, and asked, 'Is this Miss Albright?'

"After exchanging a few words they took a little walk about the village. They strolled into Magnolia Park, sat down on one of the seats, and were soon lost in conversation. Walter, having traveled extensively, soon entertained Minnie with a long and brilliant account of his adventurous life. After spending a pleasant hour together they decided to meet the following morning, at the beautiful Memorial Church, East Hillside.

"It was a charming Sabbath, and Walter met Minnie promptly at the church. After the service was over the lovers took a stroll through the University grounds; then, after accompanying Minnie home, Walter returned to the hotel and decided to meet Minnie after dinner, at her sister's. After Walter's return from dinner the lovers enjoyed a pleasant hour at Mrs. Hastings'; then they took a delightful drive, through the beautiful hills and valleys, to a large manufacturing city, a few miles from Hillside.

"While returning home Walter appeared to be very happy. He said to Minnie, 'Will you be my little wife? I will come on and marry you any day you appoint.'

"This sudden proposal so surprised Minnie that she hardly knew what to answer; but Walter was so much in earnest that, when she considered her mother's great age and her own need of a home, she said to him, 'You come to Hillside on Saturday, March 24th, and I will marry you Easter Monday, March 26th.'

"The newly engaged pair spent the evening at Mrs. Hastings'. At ten o'clock Walter bade his *fiancée* a most affectionate farewell, saying, 'In eight weeks, my darling, I shall come here to make you my bride, and I will marry you on the morning of March 26th, and will take you with me to reside in Somerville.'

"After Walter's departure Minnie worried a great deal about her hasty engagment. She then began to realize that they were utter strangers to each other, and felt it was her duty to know who this Larkell really was. Sometimes she thought he might be only joking; but, when a diamond engagement ring came, and also a letter to Mrs. Hastings requesting permission to marry her sister, she began to think he must be serious.

"Poor Minnie canvassed as long as possible, dreading to marry this stranger. She would have gone to Somerville to see his landlady, but felt she couldn't afford to take the trip. Mrs. Hastings absolutely refused to enquire about Larkell. She even refused Larkell permission to write to Minnie's mother for her daughter's hand in marriage, saying, 'I take the place of a mother, while Minnie is with me.'

"She wouldn't allow Minnie to write to her mother that she was going to marry, and threw a damper on all Minnie's efforts to find out about her future husband. She even hid the books Minnie carried out to take orders with, invited whom she chose to the wedding, and refused to invite some of Minnie's dearest friends and relatives.

"Mrs. Hastings hurried up the approaching wedding, seemed delighted to think it was coming off, and called Minnie the most indifferent bride she ever knew, saying, 'The idea of calling your prospective husband "Mr. What-you-call-him," instead of Mr. Larkell!'

"Three weeks before the wedding Minnie and Mrs. H. went to Philadelphia, where an elaborate wedding outfit was obtained. Cards were sent out, and preparations were made for a grand wedding.

"Mrs. Hastings had written Minnie's mother a glowing description of her future son-in-law, saying, 'It was the grand chance of Minnie's life,' and also requesting all the money belonging to Minnie to be removed from the savings bank and sent on to Hillside at once, in order that Minnie might defray the wedding expenses.

"On Saturday morning, March 24th, Walter left Somerville, and reached Mrs. Hastings' at 10.30 A. M. Easter Sunday was stormy, but that didn't prevent the lovers from attending morning service at the 'Church of the Nativity.' The following morning the sun rose clear and beautiful. At 8.30 A. M. Minnie and Walter were united in the holy bands of matrimony, beneath a floral canopy, in the handsome parlors of Mrs. Hastings, After the guests had partaken of the wedding breakfast, and congratulations had been exchanged, the newly married pair were driven down to the station, where they took the nine o'clock train for Somerville. During the journey Minnie noticed Walter's manner towards her had changed. The poor girl began to think he was the most indifferent bridegroom she had ever seen.

"That morning Mrs. H. had said, 'Minnie, I suppose you will ride in the bridal car.' But, in

lieu of a bridal car, they rode in a passenger car; and while waiting at Monmouth Junction, to exchange cars, Minnie hardly dared approach Walter on account of his freezing manners.

"Now Larkell, being Assistant Superintendent of the Metropolitan Insurance Company of Somerville, drew a handsome weekly salary.

"In the course of their journey Walter consulted Minnie as to what they had better do — ride in a carriage, or walk to their future home, when the train reached Somerville. Now as all the brides she had ever known were always driven from the station to their future home, Minnie, being somewhat surprised at the question, failed to make a definite reply; but when the train arrived at the station Walter decided to walk, as he wished to stop at 'the insurance office,' as that was on their way to his boarding-house. Upon their arrival at the office Minnie was surprised to find it was a small, dirty room; beneath which was a drinking-saloon, in which some men were engaged in drunken revelry.

"Minnie expected Walter would take his bride to board at a first-class house; but, instead of a fine house, he conducted her to a small two-story one. A great, coarse Irishwoman answered the bell, and bride and groom were ushered into a

low-studded room — it was the parlor! The carpet was ragged, furniture broken; three dirty, ragged children hung about their mother, and all stared at the bride as if they had never seen one before.

"In a few moments Mr. and Mrs. Larkell were invited out to dinner. The dining-room was minus a carpet, furniture falling apart, curtains torn, and no table linen was used. Bride and groom sat down to an oyster stew, composed mostly of water, one or two oysters (for an apology), and broken crackers.

"To this abode Larkell brought his bride, to go to housekeeping; as he had engaged three rooms for that purpose of Mrs. Leary. His insurance office he had removed to the second floor of this fine mansion; back of it was the bedroom, and then the kitchen. Imagine Minnie's chagrin, to keep rooms in such an abode as this!

"Minnie had brought three trunks of valuable articles from Hillside — articles which she had carried there from her dear New England home. Her wardrobe consisted of several handsome suits, with everything to compare. The morning after their arrival Minnie wore a handsome cardinal tea-gown, trimmed with black lace and red satin ribbon. Then Walter began to assume his

authority. His first greeting was — 'Pet, you need something practical to wear; you want some calico wrappers.' Some calico skirts and shirt waists were produced, and Minnie was expected to prepare the breakfast and do everything as well as an old experienced housewife.

"Before marriage Walter promised to hire a girl, and to give Minnie his money to take care off; but after marriage she soon found he married her to do his work. Poor Minnie tried her best to excel as a housekeeper; but, not being used to it, she was very slow about it. Mrs. Leary, being a kind-hearted woman, often sent up food ready for the table, and also came upstairs quite often to help 'poor Mrs. Larkell.'

"A week after the wedding Walter's brother Frank came to board with them, and Minnie had a hard time endeavoring to please these two men, who were very impatient and unreasonable. They would say, 'Any woman can make a first-class housekeeper, after being shown once or twice.'

"Walter and Frank would take long tramps into the country, to get people's lives insured, and Minnie never knew when they would be home to meals. Minnie arose every morning at five o'clock, and prepared them a nice breakfast while they were in bed reading five-cent 'blood and thunder' stories.

"Finally the Larkells left Mrs. Leary's, and hired five rooms in a tenement house; while there, Walter and Frank were more tyrannical than ever. Walter provided nothing for the table but baker's bread, salt mackerel, salt pork, and potatoes; no cakes, pies, fruits, or luxuries Minnie was accustomed to, being allowed. The balance of Minnie's property was used to furnish the house with; and, as Walter and Frank never gave her a cent of money, her case was indeed a sad one.

"Walter grew worse every day. Finally he refused to provide wood for the fire, or food for the table. One morning poor Minnie took the coffee-pot in to one of the neighbors, to get some coffee boiled, as she was longing for a good meal. Kind neighbors, hearing of the case, invited Minnie to eat with them. No sympathy was felt for Larkell or his brother — they proved dissipated in every way. They bought their meals out, never caring whether Minnie was provided for.

"After enduring insults and abuse from these villains for over two months, Minnie decided it wasn't safe to keep house for them any longer. One fine June morning Walter and Frank went to Red Bank to visit their parents. As Minnie had never been invited to visit her husband's

family, being left alone in the house, she knew that now was her chance for escape. Accordingly a teamster was engaged, who carried her things back to Mrs. Leary's, who had befriended her in trouble, and who had offered her a home if she had to leave Larkell. Being a stranger in the place she knew nowhere else to go.

"Soon after Minnie's return to Mrs. Leary's she was taken seriously ill. A week before her illness Walter left town; being drummed out of Somerville by its inhabitants, for non-support and abuse of his young wife. Minnie was obliged to get off a sick bed, before she had sufficiently recovered her strength, in order to raise means to pay her board and other expenses.

"After leaving Larkell Minnie soon found he had married her under false pretenses. He had always represented himself as a widower, and before marriage said, 'My poor wife died of pneumonia twelve years ago; it nearly broke my heart to lose her. My daughter Maud has been living at Seaside, with her uncle and aunt, since my wife's death. I lost my little boy — he fell from a swing and broke his back, shortly before his mother died.'

"Imagine Minnie's surprise when she was informed on the street, one day, that Larkell's wife

was alive and had married again; that Maud lived with her mother, and that they resided at Seaside.

"Hearing a 'Grand Excursion' was going from Somerville to Seaside caused Minnie to decide to go with the party, and find out if these reports were really true. So the morning of July 14th, Minnie, Mrs. Leary, and the children, all went down to Seaside on the excursion steamer 'Daisy Bell.' After a sail of several hours the boat landed at Seaside. Upon the arrival of the party Minnie inquired for Mrs. Sherman (which she had ascertained was the name of Larkell's former wife); and, all the inhabitants of such a resort being acquainted, Minnie experienced no difficulty in finding Mrs. Sherman.

"A woman who kept a candy store informed Minnie that two brothers named Sherman, who let boats, had a brother George who married Larkell's wife. Upon this information our party called on the 'Sherman Bros.,' who received them cordially and corroborated the woman's statement. They said, 'Our brother George married Walter Larkell's wife.' And when Minnie was introduced to them as Walter's present wife they seemed perfectly astonished. They also informed their visitors that the wagonette which was standing in sight would soon pass their brother's door,

and that they (the visitors) had better get in it, and call on their brother's wife.

"Upon this suggestion Minnie, Mrs. Leary, and the children entered the wagonette, and were driven up to a small, unpainted fish-hut, containing only two rooms — and this was the abode of the former Mrs. Larkell! The driver alighted, entered the mansion, and introduced Mrs. Sherman to her visitors. Mrs. S. was a poor, untidy woman; but she possessed a warm heart, and received her visitors most cordially. She seemed pleased to meet her former husband's present wife, and said, 'Is this Minnie Albright? I knew Walter was married again. I saw one of the wedding cards, and have always wanted to see you.' She then introduced Minnie to her present husband, who, like his brothers, was astonished that such a lady as Minnie should marry Walter Larkell.

"Minnie said to Mrs. S., 'Walter informed me you were dead.'

"'Oh! I am dead to him. I have been divorced from him twelve years'. Pointing to some children in the garden, she added, 'Those four boys are children of my second marriage; and that little girl is Maud, Walter's child' — and poor Maud, in ragged dress, bare feet, and un-

combed hair, gazed at Minnie with a vacant stare.

"Then Mrs. S. took her successor by the hand, and led her to a very pretty cottage, the home of her brother, Charles Green. He was husband to Walter's youngest sister (formerly Lizzie Larkell). As Walter's mother was there on a visit from Red Bank, Minnie had an opportunity to see her mother-in-law. After Minnie had been introduced to the family they all seemed delighted to see her. Walter was the image of his mother (she was a tiny woman, only weighing eighty pounds), while Frank and Lizzie resembled each other.

"Walter's mother said, 'I asked Walter why he didn't bring you down to see me, and he said you didn't want to come.'

"And Minnie replied, 'He never invited me.'

"As the passengers were only allowed one hour and thirty minutes at Seaside, Minnie and the Learys were obliged to bid Walter's relatives a hasty adieu, in order to reach the boat in season for Somerville. They all wished Minnie could have stayed longer, invited her to make them a visit and write to them occasionally, and Mrs. Sherman accompanied the party to the boat.

"During Minnie's visit to Seaside she obtained the following information from Walter's former

wife: 'You cannot imagine what I suffered from that man. He would come home drunk; many are the beatings I have received from him. You did just right to leave him; he beat me, starved me, never supported me — I was obliged to take in washing — and then he would take my earnings away from me. We had a sweet little boy, Johnny; he would be sixteen if he were living now. One night when Walter came home drunk, seeing Johnny enjoying a swing, he told him to stop swinging; but, because the little boy didn't mind right away, he yells, "I'll make you mind!" — at the same time kicking him in the back, so that he fell out of the swing unconscious. He only lived a few days and died from a broken back, in his fourth year. I never lived with Walter after Johnny died.'

"Minnie spent the summer canvassing; and, as she had the sympathy of the town, everyone was ready to help her. One night when Minnie returned from her work, Mrs. Leary said, 'Larkell is here and wants to see you.' But Minnie retired early that evening, refusing to see him. The next morning Walter insisted on seeing Minnie. They met at the breakfast table, appeared cordial, and took a walk in the surrounding country. After spending the day together

Walter took the train for Camden, kissed Minnie and bade her a most affectionate farewell, saying, 'I will be here again in about a week, and take you with me to Camden, where we will board, and be happy again.'

"Now, as Walter had frequently said, 'I am not going to support any woman; my wife must abide by my rules, and do just as I say,' Minnie hadn't any faith in his promises. She knew full well, if he intended to take her to Camden, he would have taken her with him.

"A few weeks after Walter's visit Minnie went to Camden, called where her husband boarded, informed the landlady she was Walter Larkell's wife, at the same time producing her marriage certificate; but the woman only laughingly said, 'Why, I didn't know Larkell was married! He has gone to Red Bank to visit his parents.' And poor Minnie has never seen or heard from him since.

"Weary and disgusted with her surroundings, her money all gone, and also nearly all the valuable articles which she had brought with her, the poor girl grew sick with despair. At last one true friend was raised up, who got the charitable people interested in the case; a collection was raised, and Minnie was sent to her dear home and mother once again.

"Now all the trouble which befell poor Minnie was brought on by marrying a stranger! — answering an advertisement!

"Now, dear young readers, heed my advice; this is a true account of a friend's misfortune, Never be too hasty for a home or husband; but know thoroughly the character and family of the man you are to marry, or else, like poor Minnie, you will make a perfect wreck of your life.

"Therefore, dear children, take warning from Minnie's sad fate, follow my advice, and 'Look before you leap.'"

AUNT KATIE.